

T.s. Eliot

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

- This poem, the earliest of Eliot's major works, was completed in 1910 or 1911 but not published until 1915. It is an examination of the tortured psyche of the prototypical modern man—overeducated, eloquent, neurotic, and emotionally stilted.

The title of the poem is Eliot's first hint that this is not a traditional love poem at all. "J. Alfred Prufrock" is a farcical name, and Eliot wanted the subliminal connotation of a "prude" in a "frock."

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- “Prufrock” displays the two most important characteristics of Eliot’s early poetry:
 - First, it is strongly influenced by the French Symbolists, like Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire, whom Eliot had been reading almost constantly while writing the poem. From the Symbolists, Eliot takes his sensuous language and eye for unnerving or anti-aesthetic detail that nevertheless contributes to the overall beauty of the poem (the yellow smoke and the hair-covered arms of the women are two good examples of this).

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- Eliot chooses to make Prufrock an unacknowledged poet, a sort of artist for the common man.
- Eliot sustained his interest in fragmentation and its applications throughout his career, and his use of the technique changes in important ways across his body of work.
- Eliot's use of bits and pieces of formal structure suggests that fragmentation, although anxiety-provoking, is nevertheless productive; had he chosen to write in free verse, the poem would have seemed much more nihilistic.

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- The kinds of imagery Eliot uses also suggest that something new can be made from the ruins: The series of hypothetical encounters at the poem's center are iterated and discontinuous but nevertheless lead to a sort of epiphany (albeit a dark one) rather than just leading nowhere.

There are fragments of images, gloomy cityscapes, reflective inner thoughts and an uneasy questioning self that is the anti-hero Prufrock. He is both ditherer and dreamer, a split personality who procrastinates, who is caught between fantasy and reality.

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- Although the title of the poem suggests that its content is enchanting about the ripe memories of love, the situation is quite contrary.
- The poem captures the unexpressed love and fragmented thoughts of the narrator. The narrator of the poem is a middle-aged man, who is in love with a lady but lacks the courage to express his feelings for her.
- The expressions of confusion and lack of courage remain at the core of the poem. Through his regret of aging and frustration of unfulfilled desires, the narrator also expresses that the time does not wait for anyone.